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**U.S. ANNOUNCES EXTRADITION OF DOMINICAN LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER
AND ARRESTS OF ALLEGED MAJOR DOMINICAN TRAFFICKERS**

DAVID N. KELLEY, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced today the extradition and scheduled presentment of LUIS RICARDO REYES-MENDOZA, a former Dominican Republic law enforcement officer, the latest defendant charged in a Superseding Indictment charging 20 people in the United States, Colombia, and the Dominican Republic with participating in an international conspiracy to import hundreds of kilograms cocaine into the United States from Colombia and the Dominican Republic. The arrests were the result of Operation Crown Jewel, an investigation involving the cooperative efforts of law enforcement in the United States, Colombia and the Dominican Republic.

The unsealing of the Indictment follows the recent arrests in the Dominican Republic of LUIS RICARDO REYES-MENDOZA, ROCQUE RODRIGUEZ-GONZALEZ, a/k/a "Mendes Rodriguez," a/k/a "El Viejo," and CARLOS VILLAVIZAR-GUZMAN, in the Dominican Republic on charges that they were the leaders of a sprawling

international cocaine conspiracy. GLADYS SURIEL-COLLADO, also charged, remains a fugitive. The Organization allegedly used the services of LUIS RICARDO REYES-MENDOZA, a law enforcement officer and member of the Customs Service in the Dominican Republic. According to the Indictment and request for extradition, REYES-MENDOZA used his official position with the Customs Service to corruptly determine whether the Dominican Police and the DEA were investigating members of the Organization in the Dominican Republic. REYES-MENDOZA, for a fee, then allegedly related that information to the members of the Organization to assist them in avoiding the detection of law enforcement. REYES-MENDOZA was intercepted while asking another law enforcement officer for information in exchange for "a gift," it was charged. REYES-MENDOZA will be presented before United States Magistrate Judge KEVIN N. FOX later today.

The arrests follow the 2003 arrest in Colombia of two of the alleged Colombia-based ringleaders of the conspiracy, PAULINO de la SALCEDO-GENAO and MAURICIO RIVAS-GOMEZ, and the arrest of MARCOS PENA-GONZALEZ in the Dominican Republic, all of whom were subsequently extradited to the United States. Also previously charged and arrested in the New York metropolitan area were ANDREA NUNEZ, LEYDA SELKOW, JOSE ANGEL CASTANEDA, a/k/a "Balthazaar Garcia," MIGUEL SANTOS, RAMON ALMONTE, OSCAR CARINO, GABRIEL POLANCO, SARITA GREGORIO, JUAN ESPINO, VENICIO MARINEZ, VICTORIA SILVA and CESAR ROBLES, (the "Defendants"). Colombian

authorities also previously arrested five additional individuals who are being charged in Colombia.

The Indictment charges the defendants with conspiring to export hundreds of kilograms of cocaine to New York City and elsewhere. Specifically, ROCQUE RODRIGUEZ-GONZALEZ, CARLOS VILLAVIZAR-GUZMAN, and GLADYS SURIEL-COLLADO are charged with orchestrating the deliveries of hundred kilogram cocaine shipments to MARCOS PENA-GONZALEZ and ANDREA NUNEZ, the leaders of a cocaine distribution network based in New York City.

ALEX VAZQUEZ, VICTORIA SILVA, MIGUEL SANTOS, JUAN ESPINO, VENICIO MARTINEZ, GABRIEL POLANCO, SARITA GREGORIO, and RAMON ALMONTE are charged with receiving multi-kilogram quantities of cocaine from PENA-GONZALEZ and NUNEZ for distribution in the greater New York City area, including New Jersey.

According to the Indictment and requests for extradition, ROCQUE RODRIGUEZ-GONZALEZ, CARLOS VILLAVIZAR-GUZMAN, and GLADYS SURIEL-COLLADO and other members of the Organization were detected through the use of wiretaps of their telephones in the Dominican Republic, Colombia, and the United States, where they used coded language to refer to quantities of narcotics, including "pretty girls," "computer discs," and "invitations to Sammy Sosa's birthday party."

If convicted, each defendant faces a maximum sentence of life in prison and a \$4 million fine, or twice the gross gain

or loss resulting from the crime.

Operation Crown Jewel is being prosecuted by the Office's International Narcotics Trafficking Unit, with the assistance of the New York Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force, which is made up of agents of the Drug Enforcement Administration, Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Internal Revenue Service, United States Marshals Service, New York State Police and the New York City Police Department.

Mr. KELLEY praised the investigative efforts of the Strike Force, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Colombian National Police and the National Drug Police in the Dominican Republic. He said the investigation is continuing.

Assistant United States Attorneys NEIL BAROFSKY and KEVIN R. PUVALOWSKI are in charge of the prosecution.

The charges contained in the Indictment are merely accusations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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